

What is an ‘ever-closer union’?

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The preamble to the [Treaty of Rome](#) (1957), the international agreement that was the beginning of the EU, says that the signatories are “determined to lay the foundations of an ever-closer union among the peoples of Europe”. As it transpires, this has turned out to be a highly controversial sentence. David Cameron’s successful EU negotiations expressly sought to exclude the UK from this. **Millicent Ragnhild Scott**, who took part in the expert proceedings on the matter, in the [LSE Commission on the Future of Britain in Europe](#), explains why.



I’ve often wondered if those who choose this sentence to criticise have simply not read the Treaty of Rome. It’s the very first sentence of an 80-page treaty and is but one of eight statements to underpin the agreement. Be that as it may.

But what does it mean?

What I personally understand by “ever-closer union of peoples” is a statement of the broad intent of the signatories to agree to the peoples of Europe cooperating, rather than fighting.

The concept, as I see it, is one that is in opposition to war. The leaders signing the treaty, including HM Queen Elizabeth II, had lived through two world wars in Europe where millions died and colossal damage was caused to the economies, societies and infrastructure of their countries. This treaty however sought to establish a context for peacetime. A context of co-design and co-occupation; of a shared and networked continent. It is not simply an intergovernmental agreement, but intends to lay the foundations of the closer collaboration of their *peoples* – for example through trade relations.

The statement is intended to draw attention to the similarities of the peoples of Europe, rather than to the divisions, falsely created and magnified by wartime.



The signing ceremony for the Treaty of Rome in 1957

I believe that the “peoples” which they seek to bring into ever closer union is intended to mean the citizens of the nation states of the signatories to the treaties; however, it does not specify whether the statement also includes

those who identify as non nation state identities as a “people” (eg Scottish or Flemish) and/or those who identify as pan-national (eg Jews, Francophones or South Slavs).

To my mind, in the wake of world war two, the “peoples” refers to all to whom Europe (or the geographical areas within the national borders of the signatories) is home. Thus the peoples of Europe includes the nationals of the nation states, but also the Jewish people, Gypsy people etc. to whom these territories are home. This will have been significant in the aftermath of the second world war.

This, I believe to be the spirit in which the document is written.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of BrexitVote, nor of the London School of Economics. Image [credit](#).

Millicent Ragnild Scott is a LSE alumna and now director of an international NGO. Twitter [@MissMillicent](#)

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